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Consumer Misperceptions of Diet Quality

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"Consumer Misperceptions
of Diet Quality"

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by
Jayachandran N. Variyam,
Young Shim, and
James Blaylock

For more information contact
Jayachandran N. Variyam at
jvariyam@ers.usda.gov,
Young Shim at
syoung@seowon.ac.kr,
James Blaylock at
jblayloc@ers.usda.gov
<http://www.ers.usda.gov>

This study compares consumers' self-perceived diet quality with calculated diet quality to assess the degree of consumer misperception regarding diet quality and to identify factors associated with such misperception. Measures of perceived and calculated diet quality were obtained for a sample of 2,862 household meal planners/preparers from the 1989-90 Continuing Survey of Food Intake by Individuals (CSFII) and the Diet and Health Knowledge Survey (DHKS). The perceived diet quality was measured by consumers' self-perception of the overall healthfulness of their diet. The calculated diet quality was measured by the Healthy Eating Index, a 10-component indicator of overall diet quality developed from 3 consecutive days of monitoring, involving a 1-day, 24-hour dietary recall and 2-day diet record. Dietary misperception was assessed by classifying respondents based on categories of perceived and calculated diet quality into three groups: optimists, realists, and pessimists. Bivariate statistical tests and multivariate logistic regression were used for comparing the characteristics of optimists with the other two groups. An estimated 40 percent of the population of household meal planners/preparers were optimists who perceived the quality of their diets to be better than their calculated diet quality. In multivariate analysis, household size, gender, education, smoking status, perceived health status, importance of nutrition when buying food, and belief about the need for dietary change were found to be significant predictors of being optimistic about diet quality. Nutritionists and health professionals need to be aware of this misperception and alert dietary optimists about their false perceptions on diet quality.

